U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
White River Field Office
220 E Market St
Meeker, CO 81641

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NUMBER: DOI-BLM-CO-110-2011-0127-EA

CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER: N/A

PROJECT NAME: Dragon Compressor Stations Hazardous Fuels Reduction

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: Unit 1 – Rabbit Mountain Compressor
T. 2S. R. 103W.
Sec. 10 SE/SE Sec. 15 NE/NE
Unit 2 – Station 113
T. 2S. R. 102W
Sec. 19 NE/SE

APPLICANT: Bureau of Land Management- White River Field Office

PURPOSE & NEED FOR THE ACTION: The purpose of the Proposed Action is to reduce wildfire hazards for protection of oil and gas facilities, industry personnel, and to reduce the safety risk to responding firefighters working near active compressor stations. Wildland fuels have built up in the area adjacent to both compressor stations. The geographic area within a five mile radius of each of the proposed treatments has a fire history with numerous small fires in the pinyon/juniper (PJ) stands and shrub communities. Recent large fires in the area include the Klinger fire of 2000 (750 acres), the Big Bull fire of 2000 (83 acres), and the Toro fire of 2001 (10 acres).

Decision to be Made: The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will decide whether or not to approve the thinning of 50 acres of pinyon/juniper woodlands and, if so, under what conditions.

SCOPING, PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AND ISSUES:

Scoping: Scoping was the primary mechanism used by the BLM to initially identify issues. Internal scoping was initiated when the project was presented to the White River Field Office (WRFO) interdisciplinary team on 6/7/2011. External scoping was conducted by posting this project on the WRFO's on-line National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) register on 6/15/2011.

Issues: No issues were identified during public scoping.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES:

Background/Introduction: Rio Blanco County (RBC) is among the top three highest counties in Colorado for probability of wildfire (Neuenschwander et al. 2000). As part of an emergency preparedness review, Rio Blanco County evaluated risk of wildland fire through geographic information systems analysis (RBC 2003). This analysis involved overlaying fuels with community features, such as homes, oil and gas wells, roads, industrial faculties, electrical lines, and wildlife habitat. Rio Blanco County identified the protection of industry infrastructure as a high priority in their Strategic Wildland Fire Management Program (RBC 2003a).

Hazardous fuel loads have built up to levels of concern. The facilities are at risk of damage during the event of a wildfire due to continuous PJ canopy which elevate the potential for an uncontrollable crown fire.

Proposed Action: The BLM is proposing vegetative treatments to help protect two separate compressor stations by reducing hazardous fuels, creating defensible space, and improving fire suppression options (see Figure 1). The proposal is to treat a total of 50 acres of vegetation adjacent to the facilities using a hand thinning treatment to reduce the potential loss of the structures by wildfire. Approximately 35 acres would be treated at the Rabbit Mountain Compressor site (see Figure 2) and 15 acres at the Station 113 site (see Figure 3).

Hand Thinning will be accomplished using chainsaws and pile burning. Crown spacing would be thinned to approximately 15-20 feet with chainsaws. The stumps will be cut down to a height of 4 inches or less. Slash piles will be burned after adequate snow cover to limit spread into the remaining canopy.

Design Features:

1. The largest and oldest trees will be left uncut. Where practical, an even mix of pinyon and juniper will be left. Also, a mix of hard and soft snags will be left to provide adequate wildlife habitat within the treatment unit. The trees left uncut will be limbed up to reduce the amount of ladder fuels.

2. All units will be created to match existing vegetation openings in the surrounding environment and to blend in with existing vegetation to avoid visual angular features of the treatment.

3. The treated areas would be monitored for noxious/invasive weed infestations for a minimum of three years post treatment. Any infestations identified will be suppressed/eradicated by BLM.

4. Pre-implementation monitoring plots will be installed and then monitored to evaluate treatment effectiveness, vegetation succession, and plant diversity.

5. A minimum of a 10 ft buffer of untreated vegetation will be left around drainages to inhibit excessive erosion.

6. Piling and burning of overstory biomass will be avoided in dry shale drainages.

7. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(g), the BLM project lead will notify the Authorizing Officer (AO), by telephone and written confirmation, immediately upon the discovery of human remains, funerary items, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony. Further, pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(c) and (d), the proponent must stop activities in the vicinity of the discovery and protect it for 30 days or until notified to proceed by the AO.

8. The BLM project lead is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing archaeological sites or for collecting artifacts. If archaeological materials are discovered as a result of operations under this authorization, the proponent must immediately contact the WRFO Archaeologist.

9. The BLM project lead is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project operations that they will be subject to prosecution for disturbing or collecting vertebrate fossils, collecting large amounts of petrified wood (over 25lbs./day, up to 250lbs./year), or collecting fossils for commercial purposes on public lands. If any paleontological resources are discovered as a result of operations under this authorization, the BLM project lead must immediately contact the WRFO Archaeologist.

10. To avoid impacts to migratory bird nesting activities, fuels reduction treatments will take place outside the migratory bird nesting period of May 15 through July 15.

11. The BLM or agent acting on behalf of the BLM would complete all fueling of equipment outside of any drainage.

12. Use spill rags or other absorbent material to prevent release of fuels, drip torch fuels, and lubricants to the environment.

13. Report all spills of fuels, lubricants, etc. to the Field Office Hazardous Materials Coordinator within 24 hours.

14. Vehicle use off existing roads and trails will not occur, with the exception of pile burning activities in winter that may require fire engines and all-terrain vehicles to maintain safety during the burning operation.

15. Vegetation treatments will not occur when surface soils are saturated to three inches or vehicles create ruts in the soils during normal operations.

No Action Alternative: No hazardous fuel reduction activities would occur under this alternative.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT CARRIED FORWARD:

1.) Prescribed fire on a broadcast scale was considered but eliminated from further analysis because of the risk to industry personnel and the compressor stations.

2.) A chemical treatment (herbicide) method was considered but eliminated from further analysis because the resulting dead plant remains would still present a hazardous (although reduced) fuel situation. Application of chemical treatments would not meet the objective of thinning the pinyon/juniper canopy and is cost prohibitive. Additionally, results of selective chemical treatment (using herbicide on selected sites) can be visually unappealing.

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW: The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3):

Name of Plan: White River Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan (White River ROD/RMP).

Date Approved: July 1, 1997

Decision Language Number/Page:
Page 2-55: "Manage fire to protect public health, safety and property"
Page 2-12: "Reduce the pinyon/juniper tree component where pinyon or juniper has dominated or is invading other ecological sites."

Name of Plan: White River Fire Management Plan (FMP), CO-110-1999-099-EA

Date Approved: June 29, 1999

Decision Language:
Page 7: "Conduct prescribed burns to mitigate potential fire impacts to oil and gas facilities and cultural sites."
Page 11: "Protect scattered oil and gas facilities when threatened by public land fires."

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT & ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Standards for Public Land Health: In January 1997, the Colorado BLM approved the Standards for Public Land Health. These standards cover upland soils, riparian systems, plant and animal communities, special status species, and water quality. Standards describe conditions needed to sustain public land health and relate to all uses of the public lands. Because a standard exists for these five categories, a finding must be made for each of them in an environmental analysis (EA). These findings are located in specific elements listed below.

Cumulative Effects Analysis Assumptions: Cumulative effects are defined in the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR 1508.7) as "...the impact on the environment that results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-Federal) or person undertakes such other actions." Table 1 lists the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future

actions within the area that might be affected by the Proposed Action; for this project the area considered was the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) 5th Level Watershed. However, the geographic scope used for analysis may vary for each cumulative effects issue and is described in the Affected Environment section for each resource.

Table 1. Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Actions

Action Description	STATUS		
	Past	Present	Future
Livestock Grazing	X	X	X
Wild Horse Gathers			X (if horses are located)
Recreation	X	X	X
Invasive Weed Inventory and Treatments	X	X	X
Range Improvements	X	X	X
Wildfire and Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation	X	X	X
Wind Energy Met Towers			
Oil and Gas Development: Well Pads Access Roads Pipelines Gas Plants Facilities	X	X	X
Power Lines	X	X	X
Oil Shale	X	X	X
Seismic	X	X	X
Vegetation Treatments		X	X

Affected Resources:

The CEQ Regulations state that NEPA documents "must concentrate on the issues that are truly significant to the action in question, rather than amassing needless detail" (40 CFR 1500.1(b)). While many issues may arise during scoping, not all of the issues raised warrant analysis in an environmental assessment (EA). Issues will be analyzed if: 1) an analysis of the issue is necessary to make a reasoned choice between alternatives, or 2) if the issue is associated with a significant direct, indirect, or cumulative impact, or where analysis is necessary to determine the significance of the impacts. Table 2 lists the resources considered and the determination as to whether they require additional analysis.

Table 2. Resources and Determination of Need for Further Analysis

Determination[1]	Resource	Rationale for Determination
Physical Resources		
NI	Air Quality	This project will require the use of vehicles, chainsaws and pile burning to implement the vegetation treatment. Emissions from internal combustion engines and burning vegetation piles are minor, will occur over a short time period and are typical of casual use in rural areas, and therefore impacts to air quality are not expected.
NI	Geology and Minerals	Proposed vegetative treatment will not impact geologic resources.

Determination[1]	Resource	Rationale for Determination
PI	Soil Resources*	See discussion below.
NI	Surface and Ground Water Quality*	The proposed vegetation treatments are located in the headwaters of ephemeral drainages tributary to Douglas Creek and the White River and would not impact water quality characteristics in these surface waters. No impacts to groundwater resources are expected.
Biological Resources		
NP	Wetlands and Riparian Zones*	There are no riparian or wetland areas in the vicinity of the project area.
PI	Vegetation*	See discussion below.
NI	Invasive, Non-native Species	Due to the minimal ground disturbance and design features of the Proposed Action, it is not anticipated that an opportunity for invasive, non-native species to establish or expand will be created.
NP	Special Status Animal Species*	There are no special status animal species that are known to inhabit or derive important use from the project area.
NP	Special Status Plant Species*	There are no special status plant species in the project area.
PI	Migratory Birds	See discussion below.
NP	Aquatic Wildlife*	There are no systems which support aquatic wildlife within the vicinity of the project area. The nearest system which supports higher-order aquatic vertebrate species is separated from the project area by nearly eight miles.
PI	Terrestrial Wildlife*	See discussion below.
NI	Wild Horses	The project area is within the West Douglas Herd Area but will not be of such size or duration that it is anticipated to affect the wild horses that may utilize the area. Any wild horses displaced from this area will return upon completion of the project.
Heritage Resources and the Human Environment		
NP	Cultural Resources	The project area was surveyed at the Class III level and no cultural resources were located (Loomis 2011).
NI	Paleontological Resources	The project area is in the upper part of the Mesa Verde Group, a Potential Fossil Yield Class 5 formation, however no exposed bedrock revealing fossils was located during the cultural survey.
NP	Native American Religious Concerns	There are no known Native Americans concerns at these locations.
PI	Visual Resources	See discussion below.
PI	Hazardous or Solid Wastes	See discussion below.
PI	Fire Management	See discussion below.
NI	Social and Economic Conditions	There would not be any substantial changes to local social or economic conditions.
NP	Environmental Justice	According to the most recent Census Bureau statistics (2000), there are no minority or low income populations within the WRFO.
Resource Uses		

Determination[1]	Resource	Rationale for Determination
PI	Forest Management	See discussion below.
NI	Rangeland Management	Due to the size, timing, and minimal ground disturbance associated with the Proposed Action, it is not anticipated that livestock grazing management will be affected. See the Vegetation Section for discussion of forage.
NI	Floodplains, Hydrology, and Water Rights	The proposed vegetation treatments are located in the headwaters of ephemeral drainages tributary to Douglas Creek and the White River and would not impact floodplains, hydrology or water rights.
NI	Realty Authorizations	There is a Moon Lake Electric Association power line, and several oil and gas pipelines and access road rights-of-way in the project area; however the Proposed Action should not impact the existing rights-of-way.
NI	Recreation	The Proposed Action is not anticipated to negatively impact dispersed recreation activities in the area.
NI	Access and Transportation	The Proposed Action is not anticipated to negatively impact access or transportation in the area.
NP	Prime and Unique Farmlands	There are no Prime and Unique Farmlands within the project area.
Special Designations		
NP	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern	There are no Areas of Critical Environmental Concern within the project area.
NP	Wilderness	There are no WSAs in the project area.
NP	Wild and Scenic Rivers	There are no Wild and Scenic Rivers in the WRFO.
NP	Scenic Byways	There are no Scenic Byways within the project area.

[1] NP = Not present in the area impacted by the Proposed Action or Alternatives. NI = Present, but not affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required. PI = Present with potential for impact analyzed in detail in the EA.
* Public Land Health Standard

SOILS

Affected Environment: Table 2 shows the classification of soils that may be impacted by the project and are within 30 meters of the proposed treatment areas. There are no fragile soils and lands prone to landslides on Federal lands within the proposed treatment units.

Table 3. Soil Classifications within 30 Meters of the Project

Soil Classification	Range Site Description	Potentially Impacted Acres
Rentsac-Moyerson-Rock Outcrop, complex, 5-65% slopes	Pinion J Juniper Woodlands/Clayey Slopes	30
Yamac Loam, 2-15% slopes	Rolling Loam	20
Piceance fine sandy loam, 5-15 % slopes	Rolling Loam	12

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:

Direct and Indirect Effects: Hand thinning with chainsaws and pile burning for this vegetation treatment will disturb soils. The Proposed Action does not include the use of heavy equipment and there was no proposed use of vehicles off existing roads. Indirect impacts to soils are unlikely since pile burning will be done in the winter with adequate snow cover and the chainsaw work will be done by hand, therefore indirect impacts to surrounding soils is unlikely. Vehicle impacts in the winter with a snow cover and frozen soil are less likely. Direct impacts would be from foot traffic to do the chainsaw work and dragging of brush and limbs to the pile. Soil temperatures in the winter and the snow cover should protect soils under burn piles from potential physical or chemical processes that can occur due to high temperatures in shallow soils. Results from these processes can reduce infiltration and may damage the biotics in soils below the burn piles, but is less likely to occur in the winter.

Cumulative Effects: Oil and gas development activities near the location have disturbed soils, resulted in changes in surface runoff, created some localized erosion and decreased the productivity and stability of soils in some locations. This action is not likely to add to or reduce overall cumulative effects in this area.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:

Direct and Indirect Effects: No direct impacts to soils would occur. Indirect impacts may occur due to an increasing risk to wildfire causing wildfire impacts to soils. If a wildfire occurred in this untreated area, it is likely to decrease soil stability in the burned areas for one to two years after such a fire occurred.

Cumulative Effects: Same as those described for the Action Alternative.

Mitigation: None.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for upland soils: This action is unlikely to reduce the productivity of soils impacted by surface disturbing activities.

VEGETATION

Affected Environment: The proposed fuel reduction project polygons are located within a mix of pinyon/juniper woodland and rolling loam ecological sites. Primary vegetation consists of mixed age class pinyon (*Pinus edulis*), Utah juniper (*Juniperus osteosperma*), and big sagebrush (*Artemesia tridentata*). The herbaceous understory within the rolling loam sites consists of needle and thread (*Stipa comata*), western wheatgrass (*Agropyron smithii*), sandberg bluegrass (*Poa secunda*), and Junegrass (*Koeleria macrantha*).

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:

Direct and Indirect Effects: Direct impacts to vegetation includes thinning by limbing or removal, primarily of woody species including pinyon and juniper trees, because of the hand thinning method using chainsaws, this disturbance will be minimal. Following thinning and reduction of woody vegetation within the project area, herbaceous understory vegetation

(including forage for grazing animals) will likely increase in density and vigor due to the increased space and decreased competition from woody species.

Cumulative Effects: Due to the size of the project, and the selective method of thinning within the project area, disturbance associated with fuels reduction is not likely to reduce the health and sustainability of the vegetation communities within and outside of the project area. Herbaceous plant community production within the project area will likely increase.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:

Direct and Indirect Effects: There would be no direct or indirect impacts to vegetation under the No Action Alternative.

Cumulative Effects: There would be no contribution to previous, existing or future disturbances under the No Action Alternative.

Mitigation: None.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard #3 for Plant and Animal Communities: Vegetation communities within and surrounding the project area are currently meeting standards for public land health, these communities are expected to continue to meet public land health standards following implementation of either the Proposed Action or No Action Alternative.

MIGRATORY BIRDS

Affected Environment: The proposed treatment areas surround small industrial sites in well developed (i.e., roadways, pipelines etc.) areas. Vegetation surrounding the sites is dominated by Wyoming big sagebrush with encroaching or mixed-age pinyon-juniper. These sagebrush and PJ woodlands provide nesting habitat for several migratory bird species during the breeding season (typically May 15 – July 15). The only bird of conservation concern (BOCC) (designated by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) for declining population trend) is the Brewer's sparrow (BLM-sensitive), which is a sagebrush obligate. The full assemblage of PJ obligates are likely not present due to the patchy distribution and younger character of woodlands involved.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:

Direct and Indirect Effects: The Proposed Action would alter approximately 50 acres of encroaching or mixed-age PJ woodlands. Treatments will take place during the fall, well outside the breeding season and will have no direct influence on migratory bird nesting success. Indirectly, the removal (thinning) of predominately immature/encroaching PJ is not anticipated to have substantive influence on future nesting attempts or outcomes of PJ associates.

Cumulative Effects: The Proposed Action is not anticipated to add substantially to existing or proposed disturbances in the area. The modification of 50 acres of encroaching and mixed-age PJ would have no measurable influence on local bird populations.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:

Direct and Indirect Effects: There would be no direct or indirect impacts to migratory birds or important habitats under the No Action Alternative.

Cumulative Effects: There would be no contribution to previous, existing or future disturbances under the No Action Alternative.

Mitigation: None.

TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE

Affected Environment: The lower to mid elevation Wyoming big sagebrush communities and PJ woodlands are categorized by Colorado Parks and Wildlife as a big game winter concentration area. These ranges are typically occupied between October and January.

Woodlands involved with the Proposed Action are younger-age and patchily distributed and generally lack the characteristics that provide adequate nesting substrate for woodland raptors.

The distribution and abundance of small mammal populations are poorly documented within the project area; however, those species likely to occur in this area display broad ecological tolerance and are widely distributed throughout the Resource Area. Trapping efforts undertaken in 2010 indicate a high tendency, in both sagebrush and pinyon-juniper communities, for more generalized species such as deer mouse and least chipmunk. No narrowly distributed or highly specialized species or subspecific populations are known to occur in the project area.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:

Direct and Indirect Effects: The modification (thinning and or removal of encroaching PJ) of approximately 50 acres of PJ woodlands is not anticipated to have any measureable influence on local wildlife populations. Both treatment areas, which are adjacent to facilities, roadways and pipelines, may experience incidental use by wildlife but generally these areas do not provide important habitat features. Wildlife inhabiting the area are likely to be displaced temporarily during the treatment period, but would be expected to return once work is complete.

Cumulative Effects: The Proposed Action is not anticipated to add substantially to existing or proposed disturbances in the area. The modification of 50 acres of encroaching/immature PJ woodlands adjacent to existing facilities is not anticipated to have any measurable influence on local wildlife populations.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:

Direct and Indirect Effects: There would be no action authorized that would have any direct or indirect influence on terrestrial wildlife or associated habitats.

Cumulative Effects: There would be no contribution to previous, existing or future disturbances under the No Action Alternative.

Mitigation: None.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard #3 for Plant and Animal Communities: The project area generally meets the land health standards on a landscape scale for terrestrial wildlife communities. Neither the Proposed Action nor No Action Alternative are expected to detract from the continued meeting of the land health standards.

VISUAL RESOURCES

Affected Environment: This project lies within a Visual Resource Management Class IV area. The object of Class IV areas is to provide for management activities which may require major modification of the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape can be high. These management activities may dominate the view and be the major focus of the viewer's attention. However, every attempt should be made to minimize the impact of these activities through careful location, minimal disturbance, and repeating the basic elements of line, form, color, and texture. There is a moderate presence of industrial activity in the area, primarily oil and gas development, and associated heavy truck and equipment traffic on the adjoining roadways. The landscape is characterized by large rock formations and pinyon/juniper and small shrub vegetation.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:

Direct and Indirect Effects: The Proposed Action will result in a somewhat modified landscape appearance through the removal of existing vegetation. However, creating units to match existing vegetation openings in the surrounding environment and to blend in with existing vegetation to avoid visual angular features of the treatment, as described in the Proposed Action, will help to mitigate these effects. As such, the Proposed Action meets the objectives of a VRM Class IV management area.

Cumulative Effects: None identified.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:

Direct and Indirect Effects: The No Action Alternative would result in the vegetative cover of the area remaining the same, thus the visual character would be maintained as is.

Cumulative Effects: None identified.

Mitigation: None.

HAZARDOUS OR SOLID WASTES

Affected Environment: The BLM has identified these areas as having an increased risk to potential fire hazards due to the presence of petroleum products associated with the transportation of hydrocarbons. Compressor stations generally use, store, transport, and dispose of potentially hazardous materials as defined within 43 CFR 2801.5. In addition, there are existing oil and gas well pads and facilities that also have the potential to use, store, transport, and dispose of hazardous waste within the analysis area. There are currently no recorded releases or spills in or around the analysis area at this time, however, there is a potential to discover these

sites. There are no currently permitted or known illegal solid waste disposal sites within the analysis area.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:

Direct and Indirect Effects: The proposed activity would potentially increase the amount of potentially hazardous materials (i.e. fuels, lubricants, etc.) present on the site at any given time. These materials would be associated with vehicles, drip torch fuels, chain saw fuels, and other lubrications used by the BLM. The majority of releases that could possibly occur while completing the project would be small (less than 1 gallon) and would not require reporting to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. The Proposed Action does not include the disposal of any solid wastes and would not result in additional solid waste being brought to the area.

Cumulative Effects: None identified.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:

Direct and Indirect Effects: There would be no change to the affected environment as described above.

Cumulative Effects: None identified.

Mitigation: None.

FIRE MANAGEMENT

Affected Environment: The project area is located within the B5-W (Douglas Creek) and C4-W (Rabbit Mountain/Dragon Trail) fire management polygons. Vegetation descriptions and management objectives for the polygons are listed in Table 4.

Table 4. Vegetation and Management Objectives for Fire Management Polygons

Unit	Vegetation	Resource Management Objective
B5-W Douglas Creek	PJ woodlands, Wyoming big sagebrush, and greasewood.	1) Promote a vegetation mosaic representing natural distributions of plant communities of varying successional stages. 2) Protect oil and gas facilities and cultural resource sites when threatened by public land fires. 3) Manage using an Appropriate Management Response (AMR) for small fire disturbances (up to 30 acres in size in PJ or sagebrush) to promote a vegetation mosaic. 4) Conduct prescribed burns to mitigate the potential fire impacts to oil and gas facilities and cultural sites.
C4-W Rabbit Mountain/ Dragon Trail	PJ woodlands, Wyoming big sagebrush.	1) Promote a vegetation mosaic representing natural distributions of plant communities of varying successional stages. 2) Manage (using AMR) naturally ignited fires up to 500 acres in size throughout the unit to promote a vegetation mosaic throughout the unit. Protect scattered oil and gas facilities when threatened by public land fires.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:

Direct and Indirect Effects: The Proposed Action would break up the continuity of the existing PJ canopy reducing the potential for extreme fire behavior and uncontrollable crown runs. By thinning the woodland canopy and breaking up the continuity of the aerial fuels, the potential for a crown fire can be reduced and possibly prevented depending on fire behavior conditions. This would result in essentially changing the fuel type to a grass-sage fuel model, and any wildland fire would generally spread from the available fuels on the ground (grass, brush, dead/down logs), which could then be safely and effectively suppressed by fire suppression forces.

Cumulative Effects: The National Fire Plan calls for "firefighter and public safety" to be the highest priority for all fire management activities. Completion of the Proposed Action will lessen the potential for an uncontrollable crown fire in the woodlands adjacent to the compressor stations and increase the likelihood of manageable and safe suppression operations.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:

Direct and Indirect Effects: There would be no clearing of the trees and brush, thus no increase in dead fuel loading susceptible to fire.

Cumulative Effects: Retaining the present fuel condition near the compressor stations would not decrease the current potential for uncontrollable crown fires and the high hazard to the public, industry personnel, and firefighters will remain.

Mitigation: None.

FOREST MANAGEMENT

Affected Environment: The Proposed Action is located within both productive and dry exposure stand classes of pinyon/juniper woodlands as defined by a survey performed by White River Field Office personnel from 2003-2005. Productive exposure types occur on primarily lower gradient slopes and north and east aspects. Growth rates are higher in these areas due to soil features which allow for effective use of precipitation. Dry exposure types occur when slopes and soil features do not allow for the retention of precipitation. The growth rates within these areas are low and generally the trees present are mature. These habitat types are further broken down based on the age class of the stand. In this case the affected stands are both mature and young. Mature pinyon/juniper trees on productive exposure establish themselves as the dominant plant community on the site. Young pinyon/juniper trees are a component of the plant community or encroach into sagebrush and mountain shrub communities in the absence of a disturbance; reproduction, through time, will eventually establish the trees as the dominant plant community. Mature stands are valuable locally as a source of fire wood. Encroachment sites of young pinyon trees are valuable for Christmas tree harvest and posts for fence construction. The Proposed Action will occur at the transition from the mature stand classes into the young stand classes.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:

Direct and Indirect Effects: It is not anticipated that the modification of the 50 acres will considerably change the overall composition of the entire pinyon/juniper stands adjacent to the compressor stations. The selective removal will result in decreasing the pinyon/juniper dominance of the project site and set back the encroachment of the younger trees into the sagebrush and mountain brush communities.

Cumulative Effects: The modification of the 50 acres of pinyon/juniper adjacent to existing and proposed development is not anticipated to have any measureable impact on the health and growth of the overall pinyon and juniper communities in the area.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:

Direct and Indirect Effects: There would be no action authorized and the pinyon/juniper woodlands would continue to encroach and dominate the site.

Cumulative Effects: There would be no contribution to previous, existing or future disturbances under the no action alternative.

Mitigation: None.

REFERENCES CITED:

Loomis, Brian

2011 Hazardous Fuels Reduction at the Dragon Compressor Stations, Rio Blanco County, CO. Bureau of Land Management, White River Field Office, Meeker, Colorado. BLM #11-10-09.

RBC 2003 Strategic Emergency/Disaster Management Program, Revision B

RBC 2003a Rio Blanco County, Colorado Strategic Wildland Fire Hazard Management Program

TRIBES, INDIVIDUALS, ORGANIZATIONS, OR AGENCIES CONSULTED: None.

INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW:

Name	Title	Area of Responsibility	Date Signed
Bob Lange	Hydrologist	Air Quality; Surface and Ground Water Quality; Floodplains, Hydrology, and Water Rights; Soils	9/9/2011
Zoe Miller	Ecologist	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern; Special Status Plant Species	8/16/2011
Kristin Bowen	Archaeologist	Cultural Resources; Native American Religious Concerns; Paleontological Resources	8/23/2011
Tyrell Turner	Rangeland Management Specialist	Invasive, Non-Native Species; Vegetation; Rangeland Management	9/2/2011
Lisa Belmonte	Wildlife Biologist	Migratory Birds; Special Status Animal	8/25/2011

Name	Title	Area of Responsibility	Date Signed
		Species; Terrestrial and Aquatic Wildlife; Wetlands and Riparian Zones	
James Roberts	Natural Resource Specialist	Hazardous or Solid Wastes	9/13/2011
Chad Schneckenburger	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Wilderness; Visual Resources; Access and Transportation; Recreation,	8/31/2011
Jim Michels	Supervisory NRS	Forest Management	8/30/2011
Paul Daggett	Mining Engineer	Geology and Minerals	8/22/2011
Stacey Burke	Realty Specialist	Realty	8/30/2011
Melissa J. Kindall	Range Technician	Wild Horses	8/29/2011
Garner Harris	Zone Fire Management Officer	Fire Management	6/28/2011
Will Hutto	Fuels Specialist	Project Lead – Document Preparer	10/2/2011
Heather Sauls	Planning & Environmental Coordinator	NEPA Compliance	10/2/2011

ATTACHMENTS:

Figure 1: Location of Unit 1 and Unit 2 of the Dragon Compressor Stations Project
Figure 2: Rabbit Mountain Compressor (Unit 1)
Figure 3: Station 113 (Unit 2)

Figure 1: Location of Unit 1 and Unit 2 of the Dragon Compressor Stations Project

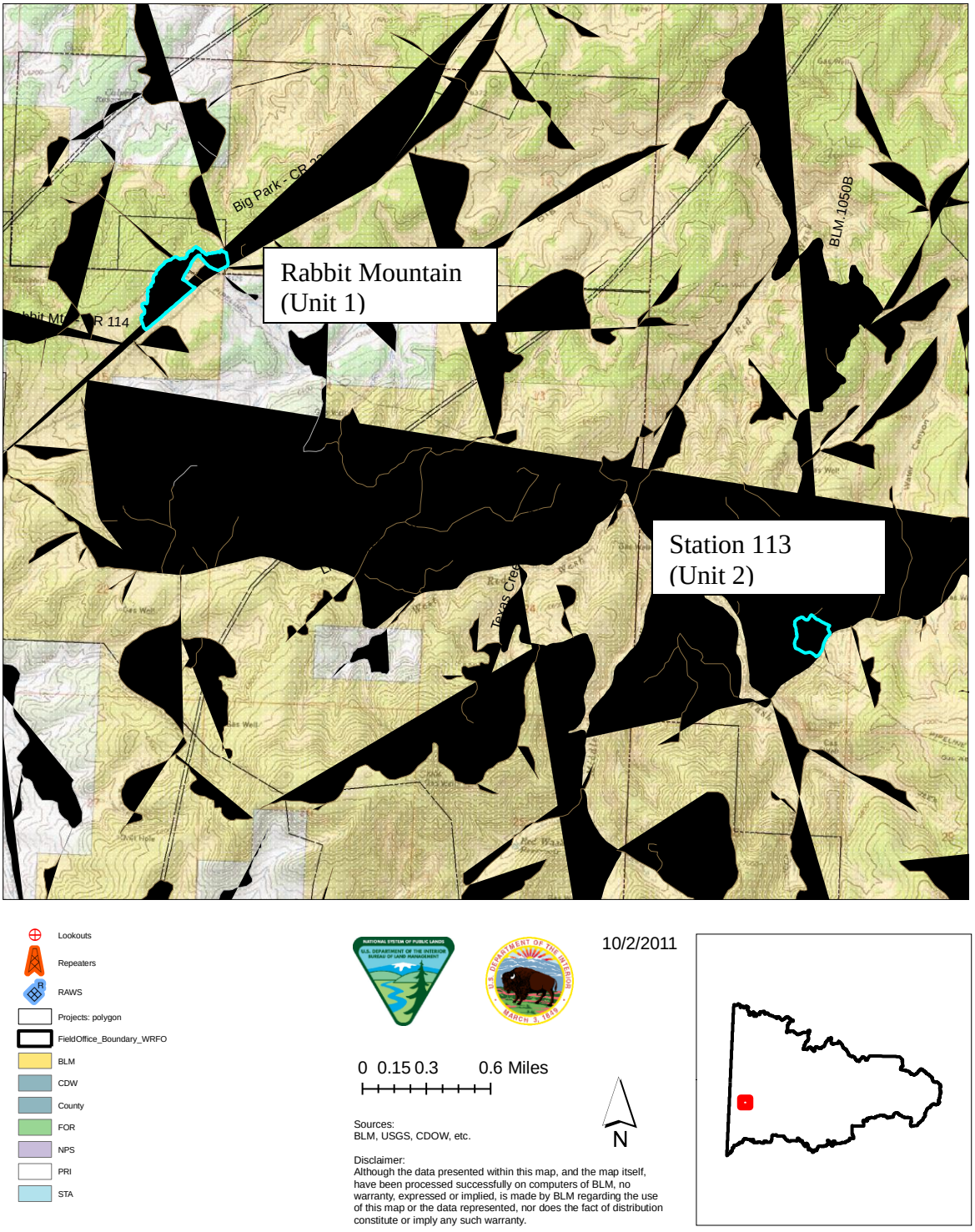


Figure 2: Rabbit Mountain Compressor (Unit 1)

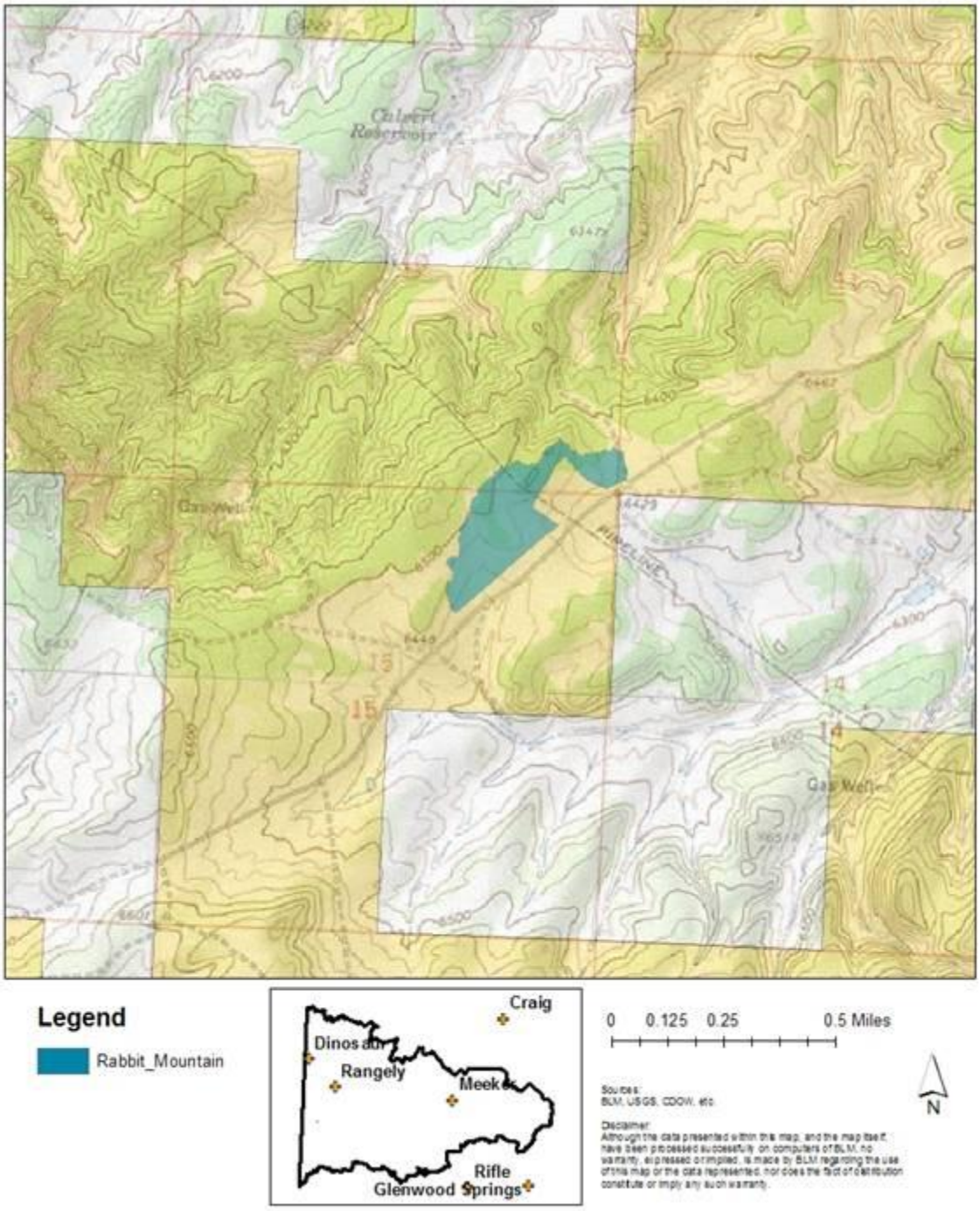
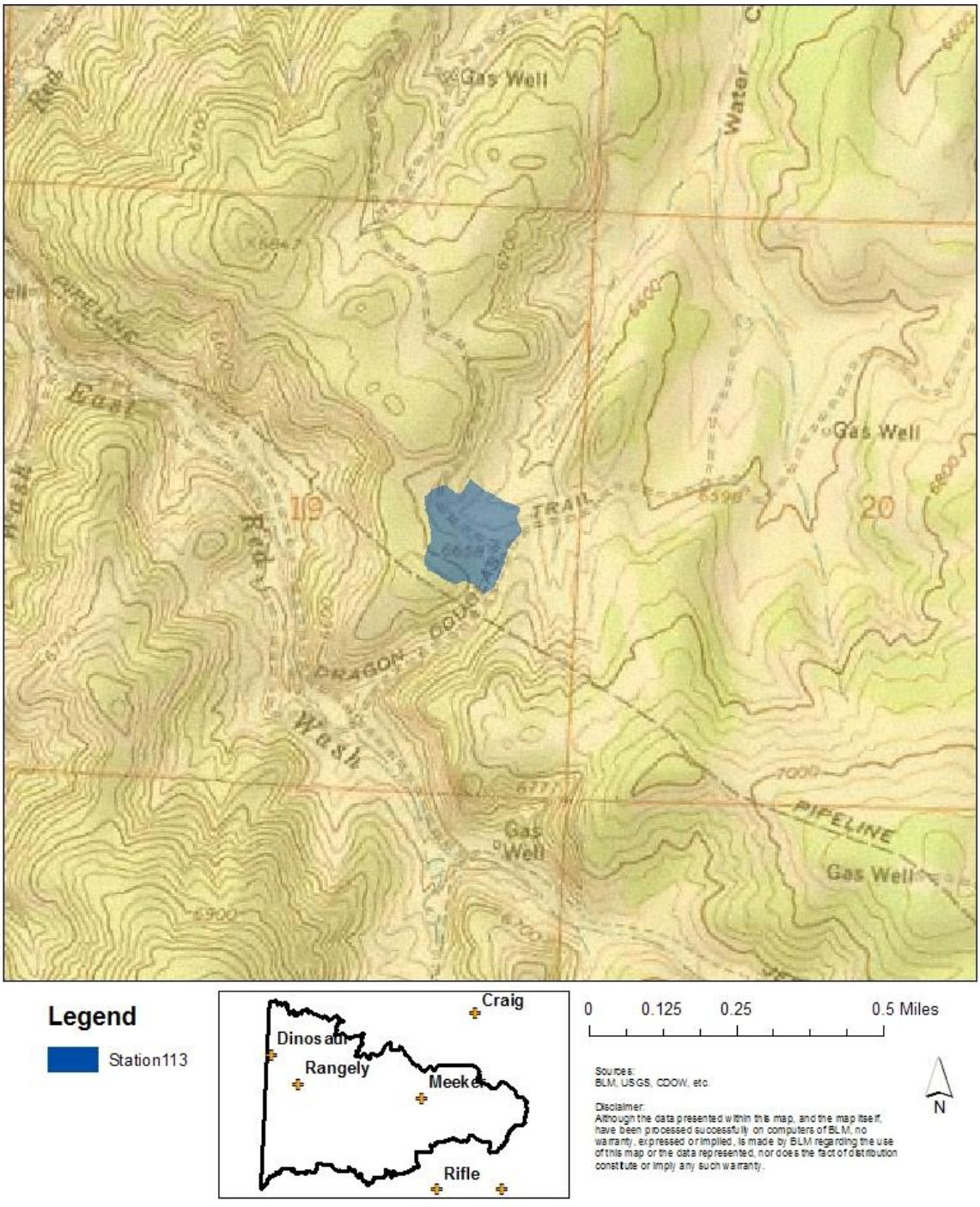


Figure 3: Station 113 (Unit 2)



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
White River Field Office
220 E Market St
Meeker, CO 81641

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

DOI-BLM-CO-110-2011-0127-EA

BACKGROUND

The BLM is proposing vegetative treatments to help protect two separate compressor stations by reducing hazardous fuels, creating defensible space, and improving fire suppression options. The proposal is to treat a total of 50 acres of vegetation adjacent to the facilities using a combination of hand thinning with chainsaws and pile burning to reduce the potential loss of the structures by wildfire.

FINDING OF NO SIGNFICANT IMPACT

Based upon a review of the EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that the Proposed Action is not a major federal action and will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity, as defined at 40 CFR 1508.27 and do not exceed those effects as described in the White River Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan (1997). Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described below.

Context

The project is a site-specific action directly involving BLM administered public lands that do not in and of itself have international, national, regional, or state-wide importance.

Intensity

The following discussion is organized around the 10 Significance Criteria described at 40 CFR 1508.27. The following have been considered in evaluating intensity for this Proposed Action:

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.
The benefit of the reduction of hazardous fuels around vulnerable compressor stations is high. The adverse effects will be burn piles around the stations until they are burnt in winter.

2. The degree to which the Proposed Action affects public health or safety.
There would be no impact to public health and safety.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically

critical areas. There are no significant historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas nearby.

4. Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial. The saw work and smoke pose a very low effect on the human environment. The project is not controversial. The hazardous fuels reduction program is in wide use in the WRFO and across the nation, for the protection of resources.

5. Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risk.
No highly uncertain or unknown risks to the human environment were identified during analysis of the Proposed Action.

6. Degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.
The Proposed Action neither establishes a precedent for future BLM actions with significant effects nor represents a decision in principle about a future consideration. The process for fuels treatments is outlined in the 1997 WRFO RMP (pages 2-12 and 2-55).

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. The Proposed Action is not related to any other actions that are currently being considered.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed on the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. No cultural resources were located in the project area.

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973. There are no listed species present within the project area.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.
Neither the Proposed Action nor impacts associated with it violate any laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL: _____
Field Manager

DATE SIGNED: 10/03/2011

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
White River Field Office
220 E Market St
Meeker, CO 81641

DECISION RECORD

PROJECT NAME: Dragon Compressor Stations Hazardous Fuels Reduction

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT NUMBER: DOI-BLM-CO-2011-0127-EA

DECISION

It is my decision to implement the Proposed Action as mitigated in DOI-BLM-CO-2011-0127-EA, authorizing the hazardous fuels reduction project around the Rabbit and 113 compressor stations.

Mitigation Measures

Design features that minimize impacts from the project have been incorporated into the Proposed Action.

COMPLIANCE WITH LAWS & CONFORMANCE WITH THE LAND USE PLAN

This decision is in compliance with the Endangered Species Act and the National Historic Preservation Act. It is also in conformance with the 1997 White River Record of Decision/Approved Resource Management Plan.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The Proposed Action was analyzed in DOI-BLM-CO-2011-0127-EA and it was found to have no significant impacts, thus an EIS is not required.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

External scoping was conducted by posting this project on the WRFO's on-line National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) register on 6/15/2011. No comments or inquiries were received.

RATIONALE

Analysis of the Proposed Action has concluded that there are no significant negative impacts and that it meets Colorado Standards for Public Land Health. Reducing fuel loads around compressor stations helps to implement decisions from both the RMP and the FMP regarding protecting property from wildfires.

ADMINISTRATIVE REMEDIES

Any appeal of this decision must follow the procedures set forth in 43 CFR Part 4. Within 30 days of the decision, a Notice of Appeal must be filed in the office of the Authorized Officer at White River Field Office, 220 East Market St., Meeker, CO 81641 with copies sent to the Regional Solicitor, Rocky Mountain Region, 755 Parfet St., Suite 151, Lakewood, CO 80215,

and to the Department of the Interior, Board of Land Appeals, 801 North Quincy St., MS300-QC, Arlington, VA, 22203. If a statement of reasons for the appeal is not included with the notice, it must be filed with the Interior Board of Land Appeals at the above address within 30 days after the Notice of Appeal is filed with the Authorized Officer.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL: _____
Field Manager

DATE SIGNED: 12/23/2011